

Subject: A Letter to the Appropriations Committee's public hearing for higher education.

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Dear Committee Members;

I am an Adjunct Professor of Art at Eastern Connecticut State University, I am also a practicing artist, a veteran and have had a parallel career in healthcare. I do not presume to speak on behalf of the Connecticut State College and University system. However, as an artist, as a teacher and parent of my share of experience, I think that I can speak with an expansive degree of authority on the subject of art in higher education

Let me begin by declaring that I fully support generously increasing the budget for our public institutions of higher learning (CSCU). Furthermore, I am of the firm conviction that the arts are no less a critical component of higher education than any other area of study. Thus the arts should be treated as vital infrastructure and appropriately supported as such.

I would like you to ponder this query:

What do The US ARMY, The U.S. Naval Institute, Yale University School of Medicine, Harvard Medical School, Penn State School of Medicine and Boston University/Boston Medical Center, the Polaroid Corporation, Apple and IDEO have in common?

All include the arts either into their operations, corporate model or arts education as a significant part of their curriculums.

My first professional experience in art was of all places, as a 19 year old illustrator in the U.S. Army. Yes, the Army has artists among its ranks. I was accepted into army public affairs right out of high school. College was NOT affordable for me, but It helped that I was fortunate enough to attend a secondary school that had a great art program. Thus arming me with a strong portfolio. The U.S. Naval Institute works very closely with concept artists whose works help the armed services envision the battlefields of the future, as well as the innovative technologies needed to negotiate those hypothetical war zones of the future. But this is not the only area where art is an increasingly critical component.

As I write, august institutions of higher learning - Yale School of Medicine, as well as Harvard, Boston University and Medical Center and Penn State University, among others, are now including both studio and performing art in their medical curriculum and have their future physicians take courses in drawing, painting, dance or evening acting,

as well as art history. It has been found that learning about art hones their skills of observation while also instilling perhaps an even more important skill...that of empathy.

It should then not come as a surprise that a physician, the late Leonard Shlain, a surgeon who also had a passion for art, found an intriguing correlation between Art and Physics. His lengthy study of this connection became the basis of his book thusly titled. He discovered that many historic artistic breakthroughs foreshadow discoveries of science, sometimes by more than a century. His book is an eye-opening read.

For younger students, art in elementary and secondary schools helps their developing motor and cognitive functions as well as critical thinking skills. To my own amazement, within two weeks of beginning piano lessons, my four year old son jumped two years ahead in reading ability. Likewise, studies consistently indicate that schools that include a healthy arts curriculum have demonstrated higher achievements in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

Speaking of which, in fact, there are literally hundreds of areas in science, technology, and engineering where artists are employed both directly as artists and or as creative consultants and designers helping to develop innovative *User Experience* (UX) based programs, products and services. Art is used in therapeutic areas as well, as attested to by the rapid rise in the field of *Art Therapy*. What makes artists so attractive to these leading disciplines is that artists typically exist in a world that does not define itself by what *should* be, but rather by what *can* be when we dare to break away from our limited mental models.

My own students at Eastern Connecticut State University span the range of concentrations and majors, from Criminal Justice, to Accounting, Political Science, and Biology as well as Fine and Applied Arts. My non-art majors are frequently as creatively innovative as the art majors, both cohorts informing each other in the engaging environment of the studio. Imagine the self-portrait done by a dual Computer Science/Biology Major, or the delicate drawings of a pre-med student. These students, the leaders and workforce of tomorrow, also include a broad range of backgrounds. Like myself they might be veterans or presently serving in military reserve and national guard. They are, again like myself, first generation university students. They include *the Dreamers*, offspring of those who, like the Founders before, have come to this country seeking freedom and opportunity. Unfortunately, it's these students who end up most affected as drastic budget cuts that result in canceling of courses have left many students in this liberal arts setting deprived of required art classes. The issue is compounded as universities hold off on replacing retiring professors while also greatly limiting opportunities for adjuncts like myself to advance in the system. All of this is food

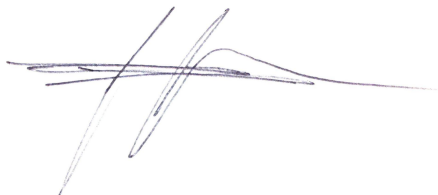
for thought as we address the issue of funding art education in our public university and college system. However many here might almighty find the following statistics more salient:

Over 80% of the constituency aka VOTERS support the funding of arts education. Here in Connecticut, creative industries account for 3.2% of the annual gross product of the state. According to a recent study by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA), the arts contribute over 800 Billion dollars of revenue to the US economy, or 4.2 % of that economy, that is more than agriculture, transportation, warehousing, gambling or sports. These figures are no secret and are available to the public. This leaves us with the serious decisions concerning expansion and funding of the arts in higher education, or the arts at all levels of education.

More to the point, and I will close with this question:

Can we truly afford NOT to appropriately fund art education in our public institutions of higher learning?

Thank You,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a series of fluid, overlapping strokes that form a stylized representation of the name Mark Gerard McKee.

Mark Gerard McKee, February 15, 2023